



EUROPEAN UNION

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Statement by High Representative Catherine Ashton on the occasion of the International Day of Democracy on 15 September

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Vice President of the European Commission, made today the following statement:

"While democracy is the cornerstone of the European Union, it is clear there is no single model for democratic government. The European Union's 27 democracies have all established their own democratic systems at different times, and in response to the different demands of their own citizens. However, there are basic principles on which we all agree. It is these principles - recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all men and women - which we recall today, and which we believe are the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. The European Union will therefore continue to make the greatest possible effort to help build stable, deep democracies across the globe.

The "Arab Spring" has sent a clear message to the world, that the quest for democracy is universal. 2011 has brought change - but also continuing challenges - to the people of the Middle East and North Africa in particular. In some countries, the legitimate aspirations of people for real change continue to be suppressed. In others, old regimes have fallen, and citizens are actively debating the sort of democratic societies they wish to see take their place. My hope for the coming year is that this process will continue to be peaceful, inclusive and constructive; that we will see genuine and competitive elections where all citizens are free to stand for election and elect the government of their choosing; that respect for human rights will continue to be at the core of these great changes. As in the EU, the countries of the Middle East and North Africa will find their own paths to democratic government. The European Union will support this process whenever such support is needed. We are already developing new means to give further support, which includes proposals for a European Endowment for Democracy, and a Civil Society Facility."

P R E S S

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